

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
897 South Columbus Avenue
Mount Vernon
Westchester County
New York

HABS No. NY-4121

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
(St. Paul's Church National Historic Site)
897 South Columbus Avenue
Mount Vernon
Westchester County
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
(ST. PAUL'S CHURCH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE)

HABS No. NY-4121

Location: 897 South Columbus Avenue, Mount Vernon,
Westchester County, New York.

Present Owner: The Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestrymen of St.
Paul's Church.

Present Occupant: St. Paul's Parish.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Significance: St. Paul's is an excellent and well-preserved
example of early colonial church architecture in
Westchester County. The adjacent green was the
site of Gen. William Cosby's denial of voter's
rights to Quakers in 1773; the resulting furor
caused by John Peter Zenger's report of the
action laid the groundwork for guarantee of
freedom of the press.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: A letter of 1764, from Rev. Milner (of St. Paul's Eastchester) to the Venerable Propagation Society states that the foundation of a new Church had been laid. An inscription over the East door reads 1765, probably indicating the progress made up to that date. By 1767, Rev. Seabury noted that the roof had just been completed but that the Church "as yet is very cold", probably from lack of window panes. He also expressed fear that "I shall never see it completed". Construction of the church did not resume until 1783. Pews were sold to parish members beginning March 12, 1787, and the church was considered "somewhat completed". In 1791, Church Trustees voted to build a gallery, but the work by Gideon Coggshall was not completed until 1804. The interior walls and ceiling were plastered in 1805 and the completed church was consecrated on October 24, 1805.
2. Architect: Unknown. The church was originally a public works project built by the town of Eastchester. It was probably designed by the "Trustees of Public Building" in the town. Those individuals holding that position between 1764-1767 included:

Captain John Fowler
Charles Vincent
Joseph Drake
Johnathan Fowler

3. Original and subsequent owners: The church and land were originally owned by the town of Eastchester. In 1787, St. Paul's became incorporated under an Act passed by Congress in 1784 insuring separation of church and state. On April 28, 1792, the town severed all ties with the church and all claims to the land. The Parish reincorporated in 1795 and according to a document of October 4th of that year, the Wardens, Vestrymen and Rector became in charge of all church property.
4. Original plans and construction: In a letter dated 1764, Rev. Milner describes the foundation of the church as being seventy-one feet by thirty eight feet". By 1787, the floor plan and location of pews had been determined. (See attached reproduction of original pew holders floor plan, data pages 6 and 7. Materials for the church were said to have included stone from the neighborhood, sand from the extreme end of the churchyard, and lime from across Long Island Sound.
5. Alterations and additions:
 - 1817 Pews were altered to run east and west and the center aisle was removed.
 - 1833 George Rapelye, Vestryman, presented an organ to St. Paul's, built in 1830 by Henry Erban & Sons. (This organ is thought to be the second oldest American-made organ in the United States still in use.)
 - 1849 Rectory is built of native stone on the site of the original church; architect unknown.
 - 1853 Vestry extended on east end by William LeRoy and Lewis Rich at a total cost of \$174.00.
 - 1855 Cellar and furnace are built; contractors unknown.
 - 1886 The wooden cupola was removed and replaced with the present stone belfry at a cost of \$3000.00. The new structure was a gift of Miss Martha Wilson and was designed by Charles Coolidge Waight, F.A.I.A., (1849-1917).
 - 1880's Stained glass windows were added.
 - 1934 Stone wall built along Columbus Ave. by WPA workers.
 - 1931 A committee was formed whose goal was to restore the church to its original plan and condition. (At that time drawings were executed by Hobart B. Upjohn envisioning various additions to the church including a museum or historical room and an outdoor altar. None of these changes ever materialized.)

- 1941 The architectural firm of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn were commissioned to restore St. Paul's to its original appearance. The altar was rebuilt and moved back to the central position, pews were rebuilt to resemble the original 1787 floor plan, the stained glass windows were removed and replaced with clear panes thought to be closer to the originals. The restoration work was completed by a Mount Vernon contractor, Charles P. Olcese, and on May 3, 1942, the church was re-consecrated.

B. Historical Context:

- 1733 An election took place on the Village Green in front of St. Paul's Church in which the results were tampered with to favor the Royal Governor's candidate. A New York City reporter, John Peter Zenger, covered the story and printed the truth about what had actually transpired at the election. He was jailed and tried on charges of libel. His acquittal in this case was a landmark decision which laid the groundwork upon which the guarantee of freedom of the press is based.
- 1758 An 1800-pound bronze bell was presented to St. Paul's Church by its Rector, the Rev. Thomas Standard. Tradition states that the bell was cast at Whitechapel foundry in London, the same spot at which the Liberty Bell was cast some five years earlier. The bronze bell was buried in 1775 to prevent its falling into the hands of the British or being melted down for cannon. In 1942, the bell was circulated for public display to arouse enthusiasm for a New York War Bonds campaign.
- 1776 On October 18th a large British force consisting mainly of Hessian soldiers led by General Kayphausen, were engaged in battle in and around Mt. Vernon. After the encounter the sick and wounded Hessians were left behind at St. Paul's Church which became a temporary British hospital. Hundreds of Hessian soldiers died and were buried in a mass grave which was discovered some years later. A D.A.R. marker today commemorates that grave and the mass grave of many American soldiers lost during various battles.
- 1784 St. Paul's was also the temporary site of the sessions of the Court of Oyer and Terminer for the County of Westchester. In a court session June 12, 1784, documents show Aaron Burr present, defending a murderer and/or horsethief.

- 1787 George Washington Adams, son of John Quincy Adams, was drowned in Long Island Sound. (The circumstances remain a mystery.) The boy's body was washed ashore onto the property of the church. A church warden discovered the body, notified the family and placed the remains in a temporary vault. In appreciation for the church's kindness Mrs. John Quincy Adams present a silver chalice to St. Paul's.
- 1931 Mrs. Sara Delano Roosevelt headed the committee to raise money for the restoration of St. Paul's Church.
- 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt worshipped at St. Paul's and then addressed a crowd of more than ten thousand citizens assembled on the Green outside the church.
- 1942 Restoration of the building began.
- 1943 On July 5, 1943, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes declared St. Paul's Church, Eastchester, a National Historic Site. He stated that, "Saint Paul's is recognized as having national significance because of its close and intimate connection with the events leading to the establishment of the Bill of Rights and its place in American architectural history and the American Revolution".
- 1955 A bronze plaque was erected on the west side of the church proclaiming the building and environs as a National Historic Site.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: In a pamphlet on the Restoration of St. Paul's Cemetary and Rectory at Eastchester, published in 1930, there exists a reproduced drawing by Hobart B. Upjohn showing plans for the 1931 restoration of the church. None of the changes were carried out. *Also see G. Koyl, American Architectural Drawings, G Vols., (Philadelphia American Institute of Architects, 1969) Entry No. 4673 lists two sheets of drawings by H. B. Upjohn, in Avery Architectural Library.
2. Interviews: Numerous interviews were conducted with Mrs. Virginia Moskowitz, President and guiding force behind the Mount Vernon Historical Society.
3. Secondary and published sources:

Alexander, James. A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963.

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Palmer, Gershon. "A Brief History of St. Paul's Church, Mt. Vernon". The Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester Historical Society, V. 17 no. 2 New York: Westchester Historical Society, April 1941, p. 58-62.

"Restoration of St. Paul's Church Cemetery and Rectory at Eastchester". New York, 1930 (A pamphlet available through the Mount Vernon Historical Society)

Rev. Coffey. "Commemorative Discourse Delivered at the Centennial Anniversary of the Erection and the Sixtieth of the Consecration of St. Paul's Church, East Chester, October 24, 1865". New York: Perris & Brown, 1866 (A pamphlet available through the Mount Vernon Historical Society)

"The Consecration of the Restored St. Paul's Church -- The Shrine of the Bill of Rights". May 3, 1942 (Pamphlet available through the Mt. Vernon Historical Society)

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